

Today we will hear from several important participants in implementing the Strategy – the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corp of Engineers, the Great Lakes region’s governors and mayors, and the academic community.

The Great Lakes are a high priority to our Members from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York, particularly in the districts that border the Lakes.

However, the Great Lakes are also important to our entire nation.

With six quadrillion gallons of water, the Great Lakes account for 18 percent of the world’s fresh water supply and 95 percent of the U.S. fresh water supply.

Over 33 million people live in the Great Lakes region, representing one-tenth of the U.S. population and one-quarter of the Canadian population. The Lakes are the water supply for most of these people.

The Great Lakes help support \$200 billion a year in economic activity in the region, including 50 percent of the U.S. manufacturing output, 30 percent of all U.S. agricultural sales, and transportation of 50 million tons of waterborne cargo, half of which is exported overseas.

Recreational benefits in the Great Lakes region amount to over \$35 billion in economic activity and over 246,000 jobs.

Like many ecosystems around the country, the Great Lakes have been impacted by industrial growth, urban development, and agricultural and commercial activity.

While most areas of the Great Lakes can be used safely for swimming, recreation, and as a source of drinking water, the Lakes do not fully support aquatic life and it is not always safe to eat the fish caught in the Great Lakes.

These water quality problems have a variety of causes.

Part of the problem is from ongoing wastewater discharges, urban and agricultural runoff, and air pollution – the same problems faced by lakes, rivers, and bays all around the country.

The Great Lakes present a unique environmental challenge. Because they are nearly enclosed water bodies, with limited outflow, toxic substances have built up in the Lakes – sinking to the bottom and contaminating lake sediments.

In 2002, this Committee moved legislation introduced by Congressman Ehlers, the Great Lakes Legacy Act, to help jump-start remediation of contaminated sediments in the Great Lakes. President Bush signed this legislation into law in November 2002.

The Legacy Act is one of many tools available for addressing ecosystem restoration in the Great Lakes.

Invasive plant and animal species also are impacting the Great Lakes.

There are at least 25 major non-native species of fish in the Great Lakes. Zebra mussels invade and clog water intake pipes, costing water and electric generating utilities \$100 to \$400 million a year in prevention and remediation efforts.

It is said that invasive species are discovered at the rate of one every eight months.

Efforts to improve Great Lakes water quality and restore the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem are proceeding through cooperative efforts with Canada as well as through the efforts of numerous Federal, state, local, and private parties.

The EPA, Army Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Great Lakes states, local communities, industry, and other parties all are involved.

With so many parties involved in trying to restore the Great Lakes, coordination of the effort can be difficult.

To improve coordination, on May 18, 2004, the President signed an Executive Order creating the “Great Lakes Interagency Task Force.”

The Executive Order called for the development of outcome-based goals like cleaner water, sustainable fisheries, and system biodiversity, and called on the Task Force to ensure Federal efforts are coordinated and target measurable results.

The Task Force, under the lead of EPA, brings together 10 Federal agencies responsible for administering more than 140 different programs in the Great Lakes region, to provide strategic direction on Federal Great Lakes policy, priorities, and programs for restoring the Great Lakes.

In December 2004, under the leadership of the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, the Great Lakes states, cities, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and other interests formed a group now known as the “Great lakes Regional Collaboration.”

The Collaboration was formed to develop a strategic plan to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

In December of 2005, the Collaboration released a Strategy recommending eight critical areas to address to restore the Great Lakes.

These eight areas include coastal health, toxic pollutants, areas of concern, nonpoint source pollution, invasive species, habitat and native species restoration, information research, and sustainable development.

I look forward to discussing the Strategy's recommendations and hearing from the witnesses how the various Federal, state, local, and other parties plan to implement them.